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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR DRL/IL (MHARPOLE)
LABOR FOR DOL/ILAB (TFAULKNER)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: INCREASING UNION ACTIVITY: PRIVATE SECTOR UNION
ELECTIONS AND A CIVIL SERVICE CENSUS

1. (U) Summary. The DRC labor sector is facing two key events in 2005: union elections and a civil census. Vice President Z'ahidi N'goma and the National Labor Council authorized labor union leadership elections in April 2004. The Ministry of Labor is attempting to organize these elections from February-April 2005 with the help of the International Labor Organization. Some union officials believe strikes are likely to be used to gain support for particular candidates and unions. Already three strikes, though unrelated to the elections, are ongoing. The civil service census, even with foreign assistance from South Africa, has been slow to start and likely will be slow to finish. The GDRC is unlikely to be able to meet any of the unions' key demands due to budgetary constraints. End summary.

First Union Elections since 2002

2. (U) After receiving authorization from Vice-President N'goma and the National Labor Council in April 2004, the Ministry of Labor - with International Labor Organization assistance - is organizing labor union elections to take place from February to April 2005. This will be the first time since 2002 that labor union elections have been held. These elections will involve almost all unions - including large umbrella unions - and will focus not only on individual labor leadership, but also will serve to elect the Congolese union and representative to represent the DRC at the 2005 International Labor Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

3. (U) Union sources told EconFSN that some unions are planning strikes as a way to show their strength and gain support before the elections, particularly because of the opportunity to elect representatives to the International Labor Conference. Currently, three different strikes not connected to labor union elections are underway. Public school teachers, public hospital nurses (septel), and the Customs authority (OFIDA) are all striking for increased pay.

4. (U) The Catholic Church and National Episcopal Bishop Conference (CENCO) decided in January 2005 to halt the requirement that parents pay \$50-\$150 each semester to supplement teachers' salaries in all church-supported schools. These payments are called "fraids de motivation," or motivation payments, and they are a heavy burden on the yearly income of the average Congolese. These fees were informally imposed on parents during the past 10 years due to the government's inability to pay adequate salaries. The GDRC has not committed to covering the "fraids de motivation," and hence, teachers started to strike Feb 14 to influence the government to pay their salaries. Teachers' unions extended their current strike for one week starting February 21 to put more pressure on GDRC to commit to pay teachers' salaries.

5. (U) DRC's customs authority (OFIDA) notified the Ministry of Finance one month ago that they would strike if the GDRC did not pay promised performance premiums and implement a salary increase by mid-February. The GDRC did not respond, prompting OFIDA employees to stop all activities on February 14. OFIDA officials told econ-FSNs that the Ministry of Finance agreed to talks with OFIDA, but formal negotiations have not yet commenced and the strike continues. The company is providing minimal service to clear only perishable goods through customs.

Civil Service Reform

6. (SBU) The GDRC has been trying since 2004 to conduct a census of civil servants in order to weed out ghost workers and have an accurate number of employees so some can be retired and others properly paid. The Secretary General of the National Union for Civil Servants (Synafet) told the Congolese press that the GDRC last year planned to work with Belgium's bilateral aid agency to conduct a civil service census. No progress was made with the Belgians, hence the

GDRC has approached South Africa for funds and technical expertise. The South African government promised approximately USD 3 million plus equipment and technical assistance.

17. (U) On February 3-5, the South African Minister of Civil Service visited Kinshasa to formalize the agreement. The DRC Minister of Civil Service told the Congolese press that he plans to start the census in February 2005 in Kinshasa (where 50 percent of the civil service is located) and finish in March. The DRC ministry of civil service hired 964 census takers and trained them from February 14-16. The Minister of Civil Service had announced that the census takers could perform a test case of the census at the Ministry of Finance, and it began on February 24.

18. (SBU) As of Feb 23, however, a representative of an American IT corporation asked by the Ministry of Civil Service to work with the South Africans on database development for the census told econoff that it is unclear when the census will take place. The Minister of Civil Service is still debating whether to start the census only in Kinshasa or try to branch out into the interior and do the entire civil service census in one attempt.

19. (U) A civil service census is needed in part to complete salary negotiations, which have been stalled since March 2004. Union representatives told EconFSN that union leaders are uncomfortable with the current pace of reform and negotiation. If the census is completed in March, there will only be a limited amount of time to negotiate salaries before the national elections. Union leaders are worried that if negotiations are not finished, they will have to start from the beginning with the new government.

Comment

112. (SBU) No matter how often the unions strike, the government will not be able to meet their demands. The GDRC 2005 budget is already under revision with the goal of cutting spending, and civil servant salaries are on the chopping block. End comment.

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